

February 14, 2016

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

Re: SB No. 70 An Act Concerning Telehealth Providers

Distinguished committee members, I want to thank you for this opportunity to address SB No. 70. I urge you to pass this important legislation to redefine "telehealth provider" to include Speech Language Pathologist and Audiologist. Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and Audiologists (AUD) delivering medically necessary services in all settings, including schools, meet state licensure requirements or have completed educational and work requirements equivalent to those required for the American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA) Certificate of Clinical Competence.

Telehealth is used, when appropriate, to overcome barriers to accessing service caused by distance, unavailability of specialists and subspecialists, or impaired mobility. Telehealth is growing as a cost-effective and efficient way to provide high-quality services for people who need speech-language treatment. Telehealth is an appropriate model of service delivery for speech-language pathologists and Audiologists. ASHA requires that individuals who provide telehealth abide by the ASHA Code of Ethics, including Principle of Ethics II, Rule B, which states "Individuals shall engage in only those aspects of the profession that are within their competence, considering their level of education, training, and experience" (ASHA, 2010).

Roles and responsibilities for SLPs and AUDs in the provision of services via telehealth include:

- understanding and applying appropriate models of technology used to deliver services;
- understanding the appropriate specifications and operations of technology used in delivery of services;
- calibrating and maintaining clinical instruments and telehealth equipment;
- selecting clients who are appropriate for assessment and intervention services via telehealth;
- selecting and using assessments and interventions that are appropriate to the technology being used and that take into consideration client/patient and disorder variables;
- being sensitive to cultural and linguistic variables that affect the identification, assessment, treatment and management of communication disorders/differences in individuals receiving services via telehealth;
- training and using support personnel appropriately when delivering services;
- being familiar with the available tools and methods and applying them to evaluate the effectiveness of services provided and to measure outcomes;
- maintaining appropriate documentation, including informed consent for use of telehealth and documentation of the telehealth encounter;
- being knowledgeable and compliant with existing rules and regulations regarding telehealth including security and privacy protections, reimbursement for services, and licensure, liability and malpractice concerns;
- collaborating with physicians for timely referral and follow-up services (Hofstetter, Kokesh, Ferguson, & Hood, 2010);
- using web-based technology to engage clients through virtual environments and other personally salient activities (Towey, 2012).

I urge your support and thank you for your attention to this important issue and your commitment to the health of all Connecticut residents.

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